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## Personal Conviction Waivers from School Immunization Requirements

### Background:

Immunizations are one of the most important advances of modern medicine, resulting in dramatic decreases in vaccine preventable disease, and sparing children (and adults) from unnecessary morbidity and mortality. Due to the irrefutable science supporting the safety and effectiveness of vaccines, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a statement calling for the “universal immunization of children for whom vaccines are not contraindicated” in 1977.<sup>1</sup> That statement has been reaffirmed multiple times, most recently in 2010. As a result of broad immunization efforts, many previously common life-threatening infections are now rare in the United States. However, while individual recipients clearly benefit from vaccines, the success of immunization programs depends on herd immunity to protect the entire community from disease. When the overwhelming majority of people are immunized against these infections, then the very young, the very old, the very sick, and those who cannot be immunized due to medical contraindications, may be protected.

Immunizations have been so successful that many parents are now unfamiliar with the serious life-threatening infections that are prevented by immunization. Unfortunately there are many information sources that selectively present unreliable, discredited, and spurious studies and anecdotes that undermine the value of routine immunizations. As a result, some have begun to doubt the value of routine immunizations. This has led to rising rates of vaccine hesitancy or refusal, and growing communities of under-vaccinated children who are vulnerable to vaccine preventable disease in the United States. A recent outbreak of measles in under-vaccinated individuals in California, originating at a popular tourist destination, dramatically illustrates the importance of under-vaccinated communities. Measles was *eliminated* from the United States in 2000. However, one unvaccinated individual can be responsible for re-introduction and infection of many vulnerable individuals.

As a medically advanced society, we must continue to protect our most vulnerable populations by preserving herd immunity. This requires that all healthy individuals receive all recommended immunizations. To this end, immunizations are mandated in schools and daycare centers as a significant site for exposure and transmission of contagious diseases. However, some individuals do have medical reasons that prevent them from being able to be safely immunized, such as a severe allergy to a component of a vaccine or immune-deficiency. These are necessary and valid exemptions.

Some states permit parents to claim personal conviction and religious exemptions, including Wisconsin. However, individuals who claim these forms of exemption are at significantly increased risk for vaccine preventable infections, and communities with high rates of exemption have dramatically higher risk for outbreaks.

**Position:**

**The Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (WIAAP) recommends that only medical exemptions from school entry immunization requirements be permitted.**

***Source:***

**American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement: *Increasing Immunization Coverage*. *Pediatrics*. 2010;125(6):1295-1304.**

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*Approved by the WIAAP Board of Directors*

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